

# Rethinking Fragmentariness and Reconstruction: An Introduction

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## 1 (Re)defining Fragmentary Languages\*

### 1.1 *Fragments of What?*

The label ‘fragmentary languages’ is generally referred to ancient, long-dead languages whose records are very scanty and often repetitive, thus preventing modern scholars from reaching a satisfying comprehension of their grammar and lexicon. In the tradition of German historical linguistics, these languages are known as ‘Restsprachen’, since their few attestations are interpreted as ‘rests’ of complete linguistic systems, now irretrievably lost in their global functioning.<sup>1</sup> From this perspective, fragmentariness is a characteristic not of the languages themselves, but of the limited corpora of their records, mostly consisting of short inscriptions and/or place and person names, as well as loanwords in other languages (§ 1.2). As a result, languages of peoples once widespread in several regions of Europe, such as Etruscan, Gaulish, and Iberian, are fragmentary only in the sense of ‘fragmentarily documented’. Their incomplete state is the effect of historical accidents, not of their structures and functions, which, at the synchronic phase of their documentation, must have been as fully developed as the ones of any other ‘non-fragmentary’ language, both extinct and alive.

Nevertheless, this is not always the case. As a matter of fact, the scarcity of documentation of some languages and, above all, the limited range of text genres hint to the fact that they had long lost their full vitality at the time of

\* Although the authors discussed the topics extensively together, Daniele Baglioni wrote section 1 and Luca Rigobianco section 2; both are jointly responsible for section 3.

1 The story of the term, first used in the scientific journal “Die Sprache” from 1967 on, has been reconstructed by Innocente (1993). In the late sixties of the last century the journal’s director was Manfred Mayrhofer. It is to suppose that the term had a previous circulation within the ‘Vienna school’ of Indo-European linguistics and spread from there to the whole German-speaking academy, as well as to other countries (above all Italy, where ‘Restsprachen’ is commonly used by historical linguists as a loanword: see Campanile 1983; Agostiniani 2003).

their attestations. Of course, they were still in use, but they only survived in particular contexts (for instance, sepulchral epigraphy, as in the case of New Phrygian), whereas the majority of the population currently spoke and wrote other languages. In this case, fragmentariness pertains both to the documentation and to the languages, which were undergoing functional retreat at a stage immediately preceding their extinction. The extant records might be seen as their 'swan song', that is to say as traces of the imperfect, atrophied competence of a minority soon to shift to the language of the majority. According to Untermann, this situation is the one for which the term 'Restsprachen' is most appropriate, due to the constitutive 'incompleteness' (or 'in re fragmentariness', see Loporcaro in this volume) of forms and functions of the languages at the epoch of their documentation. Conversely, fragmentarily attested languages which were fully in use at the time of their records are dubbed by Untermann 'Trümmersprachen', i.e. 'debris languages'.<sup>2</sup>

Untermann's distinction between 'Trümmersprachen' and 'Restsprachen', though valuable, has not so far come into general use. The reason has probably to do with the difficulty for scholars to reconstruct domains of languages attested only by a bunch of direct and indirect sources, especially when historiographical and archaeological evidence is widely lacking. As a matter of fact, in most cases it is impossible to tell whether the limitedness of functions in which a language is documented has to be ascribed to its original residual character or to the modalities of its transmission. A further problem arises with regard to the sociolinguistic status of the varieties whose records are fragmentary. By referring to them as 'languages', scholars implicitly assume that they were perceived by their speakers as autonomous, clearly distinct from the other languages of the local repertoires. However, the observation of modern multilingual societies, especially those where linguistic varieties share structural affinities due to genetic relatedness and/or intense, long-lasting contact *in situ*, reveals the arbitrariness of clear demarcations and the existence of continua. Consequently, a preliminary question in the study of any 'Restsprache' is whether its rests are to be interpreted as parts of a system or, instead, of a diasystem, in which borders between the varieties were not definite and grammatical features alternated according to social (i.e. diatopic and diaphasic) factors.<sup>3</sup>

Functional retreat, fluency of the speakers, and their perception of languagegeness can be better estimated in more recent cases of language decay, above

2 Untermann (1980; 1981; 1989).

3 A typical case of indetermination is Faliscan, which has been interpreted by some scholars as an autonomous Italic language akin to Latin, by others as a dialect of Latin (see Rigobianco 2020 for a thorough discussion).

all in minority languages and dialects still in use but rapidly vanishing, that is to say in the so-called ‘endangered languages’.<sup>4</sup> For these languages the notion of fragment is very different from the one usually applied to ancient ‘Restsprachen’, since corpora are generally much wider, include a larger variety of utterances, and mostly consist of spoken data; furthermore, new texts may be recorded or elicited through interviewing (see § 1.2 below). Nevertheless, the fragmentariness of the languages, as available to the speakers’ competence, is unquestioned, and is explicitly acknowledged by Untermann, who selects Breton as a typical example of ‘Restsprache’ in the narrow meaning of “functionally limited language”.<sup>5</sup> A further parallel can be found in the method, i.e. in the use of reconstruction. As a matter of fact, scholars who study long-dead languages and linguists concerned with severely endangered or recently extinguished varieties both resort to intra- and cross-linguistic comparison in order to recover the missing parts out of the attested elements (see § 2.1 below). In the case of endangered languages, comparison and reconstruction also prove very helpful to establish the reliability of the data collected, due to the imperfect proficiency of the speakers (or, better said, ‘semi-speakers’),<sup>6</sup> who often hypercharacterize phonological and morphological features on the basis of an imperfect command of the language, still conceived of as a system, although its knowledge is reduced to a restricted range of basic words and formulaic sentences (see Filipponio in this volume).<sup>7</sup>

4 The label ‘endangered languages’ seems to have originated in the ambit of Native American linguistics, where it already circulated in the 1980s (see Haas 1984: 71, who includes under the term “all unwritten languages”). Its diffusion as a technical term of contact and socio-linguistics largely replacing analogous designations (such as ‘threatened/menaced languages’, ‘imperiled languages’, ‘languages at risk of extinction’) has been favored by a seminal article by Hale, Krauss et al. (1992) appeared in *Language*. In the article Krauss, a leading expert of the native languages of Alaska, distinguishes ‘endangered languages’ from ‘moribund languages’, i.e. “languages no longer being learned as mother-tongue by children”, that are “beyond endangerment” as “already doomed to extinction, like species lacking reproductive capacity” (Hale, Krauss et al. 1992: 4). However, this distinction has not come into use and the lack of intergenerational transmission is set as the main definitory criterion both in Austin’s and Sallabank’s and in Thomason’s reference handbooks (Austin & Sallabank 2011: 1; Thomason 2015: 4). On Fishman’s Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) and its expansion (EGIDS), currently also used by Ethnologue, see Lewis & Simons 2010.

5 Untermann (1989: 18). Analogous parallels between ‘Restsprachen’ and contemporary cases of language extinction are to be found in the scientific literature on endangered languages (see, for instance, the mention of Akkadian, Ancient Egyptian, Etruscan, Gothic, Hittite, and Sumerian as “well-known cases” of language loss in the Introduction of Rehğ & Campbell 2018: 3).

6 The semi-speaker category has been introduced by Dorian 1981.

7 Thomason (2015: 54) observes that “identifying a semi-speaker can be extremely difficult—

Therefore, affinities between scarcely attested languages of the past and modern languages recently vanished, or on their way to extinction, concern both the insufficiency of the data for a global comprehension of their original functioning, and the methods applied to recover it. These affinities can be comprised under the umbrella term ‘fragmentariness’, meant as a general condition of languages as appears from their attestations, regardless of the causes of their quantitative and/or qualitative deficiency. In such a broad acceptance the term will be used in this volume. Including in the same volume essays on fragmentary languages distant in time and space, whose study pertains to different traditions and requires different tools and competences, going from epigraphy and philology to linguistic fieldwork, enables a profitable exchange of perspectives and a deeper awareness of the possibilities and limits of reconstruction (see § 2.2 below). On the one hand, the long-dating tradition of studies on ancient ‘Restsprachen’ supplies a consolidated methodology, which can be applied to infer the original grammatical structures out of the fragmentary data elicited from (semi-)speakers or even ‘rememberers’ (see § 1.2 below) of endangered languages. On the other hand, the examination of functional retreat, identitarian uses, and self-perception of the speakers of contemporary minority varieties affords a better understanding of the records of long-dead languages and of the contexts of their production, in line with the well-known Labovian exhortation to “use the present to understand the past”.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the observation of how minority language speakers react to the limits (or ‘fragmentariness’) of their competence, as in the cases of hypercharacterization or frequent borrowing from the dominant language (see Zuin in this volume), might prove helpful to detach similar phenomena in ancient sources, on the basis of internal evidence.

### 1.2 *Which Kind of Fragments?*

The broad definition of fragmentary languages given in § 1.1 necessarily implies an extension of the typologies of the fragments available to scholars. As far

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maybe even impossible—in the absence of independent sources of information on the dying language”, because “many semi-speakers conceal their lack of fluency by their skill in using fixed phrases appropriately, so that their speech is neither halting nor hesitant”. Consequently, “independent sources of knowledge of the dying language’s grammar, for instance closely related sister languages or old documentation dating from the days when the dying language was the main everyday language of the speech community”, are often decisive for ascertaining the degree of fluency of the informants.

- 8 Labov (1974). On the theoretical bases of this methodological assumption, known as the ‘Uniformitarian Principle’, see Baldi & Cuzzolin (2015) and Walkden (2019).

as ancient ‘Restsprachen’ are concerned, fragments are generally written, and mostly coincide with various kinds of rigidly formulaic texts. From this, it follows that the reconstruction of ‘Restsprachen’ must be based on a long chain of inferences concerning, first of all, the functioning of the writing system and, hence, the interpretation and analysis of the texts, also by leveraging the available contextual information (see § 2.2 below). In this regard, it should be noted that such interpretation and analysis are highly conjectural, due to the unavailability (or, better said, impossibility) of exhaustive grammatical descriptions and lexica—as well as the partial knowledge of the context.

This is obviously not the case for research in endangered languages, which has to do with still-living linguistic varieties and relies on potentially unlimited data elicitable from informants. As has been already noted in § 1.1, in this case fragmentariness applies to the competence of the speakers, not to the records, which can be referred to as ‘fragments’ only in the sense that they are the last remnants of once fully functional languages, thus on a qualitative level, not on a quantitative one. Furthermore, data from endangered languages radically differ from the attestations of ancient ‘Restsprachen’ in that they are typically (often exclusively) oral and do not need interpretation as for the function and meaning of the utterances. However, this does not mean that they do not need to be interpreted at all. On the contrary, in case of interview elicitation, a critical approach to the data is essential to evaluate the impact of the ‘observer’s paradox’, which is extremely difficult to minimize for linguistic varieties that speakers use in very specific domains and with a limited number of familiar counterparts.<sup>9</sup> Hypercharacterization (see § 1.1 above) may be considered one of the most common effects of the peculiar conditions in which endangered languages data is collected. Moreover, it is to observe that the availability of spoken data is characteristic only of moribund languages, not of recently extinguished ones lacking oral recordings. In this latter case, scholars are confronted with a corpus of

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9 The ‘observer’s paradox’ consists in the well-known statement that “the aim of the linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain this data by systematic observation” (Labov 1972: 209). In the case of research in endangered languages, a further obstacle must be overcome, that is what Sallabank (2013: 60) dubs the ‘researcher’s paradox’, since “researchers (especially ethnographers) are not exempt from ideological processes, and [...] research on minority languages which did not take into account both researcher positionality and sociopolitical issues would miss essential insights”. On the characteristics and risks of field research on endangered languages, see Thomason (2015: 111–152).

written texts, just like 'Restsprachen' researchers. The interpretation of the writing is of course less problematic, but still can give linguists a hard time, especially if the transcriber fashioned the spelling to the one of a more widespread and prestigious language, thus neutralizing phonetic and even phonological peculiarities. As for reconstruction, the process is equally crucial, but less inferential than in the study of ancient 'Restsprachen', in the sense that the main difficulty lies in ascertaining *what* has to be reconstructed or, in other words, telling reliable data, witnessing the present fragmentary state of the language, from unreliable information, ascribable to the speakers' attempt to recover lost forms and vocabulary through analogy and resort to other languages.

What has been observed until now refers to the so-called direct (or primary) sources, that is first-hand texts produced by native speakers and/or writers of the language. In 'Restsprachen' research a crucial role is also played by indirect (or secondary) sources, that often integrate first-hand documentation, or even make up for it, when direct sources are not available. By indirect sources a wide, heterogeneous range of records is meant, going from glosses in lexicographic works, quotations of words or sentences in texts in other languages (such as chronicles and travelogues), to place/person names and loanwords, surviving in the former dominant languages as a consequence of substratum interference. Although the distinction between direct and indirect sources is not always easy for 'Restsprachen' (see Merlin, Pisaniello & Rizza in this volume), the latter stand out for their even more fragmentary aspect (in the most common form they consist of isolated words), as well as for the greater carefulness required to scholars, who must mind not to confuse the features of the original languages with the effects of mediation. As for mediation, it varies according to the typology of the sources. In the case of lexical glosses and heterolingual insertions, it is the authors' degree of intervention that has to be established, i.e. the accuracy of their transcriptions, the exactness of their definitions, the conditioning of their perception of the Other on their descriptions of the uses, vocabulary, and grammar of the languages. Conversely, in the study of toponyms, anthroponyms, and loanwords, what has to be assessed is the role of the receiving language in shaping the current forms of the terms, in order to keep separate the outcomes of phonological and morphological adaptation from the original aspect of the word, as far as can be reconstructed (systematic applications of this method are provided in this volume by Barbato & Minervini as well as Vuletić).

The distinction between primary and secondary sources is also usual in the studies on endangered languages, but the latter category applies to a different kind of evidence. As a matter of fact, while primary sources coincide with raw

data, such as recordings and transcriptions of oral speeches, secondary data is referred to their annotations and systematizations (grammars, vocabularies) made by linguists aiming to document the languages before they disappear.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, secondary sources correspond to scientific literature, and the concept of indirect sources, in the sense of mediated testimonies of the languages as reported by non-native laymen (i.e. non-linguists), is apparently inapplicable. Nevertheless, even in the study of still-living minority languages, the analysis of loanwords in the surrounding dialects can be a precious resource for reconstructing earlier phases of the linguistic varieties, previous to the attrition process. In this case, loanwords count as indirect sources, exactly in the acceptation by which the term is used in historical linguistics. A further circumstance, typical of languages on their way to extinction, involves the so-called ‘rememberers’, that is community members who are unable to speak fluently the language and even to use it for a basic conversation, but still can provide some scattered words and phrases heard years before from their parents and grandparents.<sup>11</sup> These informants cannot be considered native speakers of the language and, as a consequence, the data they provide is indirect. Just like secondary sources of ‘Restsprachen’, this kind of documentation is more incoherent and less reliable than first-hand data. However, as is the case with less attested ‘Restsprachen’, sometimes indirect records are the only evidence available to scholars, who have no choice but to use it, in the attempt of reconstructing the vocabulary and the structure of the dormant language.

### 1.3 *How Many Fragments?*

A final issue that cannot be avoided is the quantification of fragmentariness, or, in other words, the assessment of the degree of incompleteness and incoherence of fragmentary languages in comparison to their non-fragmentary counterparts. In the field of ‘Restsprachen’ research, the matter has been dealt with in several studies, starting from Untermann’s and Prosdocimi’s pioneering reflections (Untermann 1980; 1981; 1989; Prosdocimi 1989) to the more recent contributions by Miller (2004) and Rigobianco (2022). All the above-mentioned scholars agree in the operative usefulness of distinguishing be-

10 A comprehensive overview of the data and corpora of endangered languages is provided by Mosel 2018.

11 On ‘rememberers’ see Grinevald & Bert (2011: 51–52), where the category designates “speakers with limited knowledge of the endangered languages”, and Thomason (2015: 56–57), who interprets the term in opposition to semi-speakers, because “the utterances of the rememberers”, unlike those of the semi-speakers, are generally testimonies of “an effectively dead or dormant language”.

tween ‘Restsprachen’ (or ‘Trümmersprachen’, see § 1.1 above) and ‘Corpusssprachen’, i.e. languages attested by corpora large and varied enough for a satisfying understanding of their grammar and vocabulary. The problem, though, lies in quantifying the degree of satisfactoriness of the information provided by the corpus. As a matter of fact, since all dead languages, even the best-documented, cannot be known in their integrity, a certain level of fragmentariness is also common to ‘Corpusssprachen’, or, as Prosdociami (1989: 138) puts it, “all corpus languages are, to some extent, Restsprachen”. Consequently, ‘Corpusssprachen’ and ‘Restsprachen’ must be interpreted as values disposed on a continuum, going from Latin, Greek, and other languages of the past whose attestations are numerous and include long, complex texts pertaining to different typologies (the so-called ‘Grosscorpusssprachen’), to Anatolian languages such as Sidetic, documented by only a dozen of short and repetitive inscriptions (see Merlin, Pisaniello & Rizza in this volume). In between, a wide range of linguistic varieties can be set, according not only to the number of records and their length, thus on a purely quantitative level, but also to the intrinsic characteristics of the documentation and the language. For instance, languages attested by a limited corpus of records, whose writing is easily interpretable and whose forms are comparable with strictly related sister languages, may be ascribed in some cases to the category of small-corpus languages (‘Kleincorpusssprachen’). Conversely, languages like Etruscan, whose corpus includes about twelve thousand inscriptions, some of them quite extensive (such as the ‘Tabula Capuana’ and the ‘Liber linteus’), but whose interpretation is impeded by the unavailability of direct comparison with other languages, are doomed to remain ‘Restsprachen’ even in the event of new findings not changing radically the quality of the corpus (as is the case with the recently discovered votive inscriptions in the sanctuary of San Casciano dei Bagni).<sup>12</sup>

The issue of quantifying fragmentariness may arise also for ‘Corpusssprachen’, with regard to specific varieties of these languages. A good example is Latin, which is by definition a ‘Grosscorpusssprache’, but only as far as the classical written language is concerned, whereas all oral dialects from its origins to the fall of the empire and beyond (i.e. what is generally referred to in German as ‘Lateinische Umgangssprache’) can be considered ‘Restsprachen’ because of their fragmentary and exclusively indirect documentation.<sup>13</sup> In this case, the

12 For a recent overview of the documentation of Etruscan, see Belfiore 2020. A first, preliminary balance of the corpus of Etruscan inscriptions found in the Etruscan-Roman sanctuary of San Casciano dei Bagni (Tuscany) has been given by Adriano Maggiani (2023).

13 The example of the ‘Lateinische Umgangssprache’ as a peculiar case of ‘Restsprache’ is already brought by Prosdociami (1989: 139–140).



real circulation of the varieties is unquestioned, and the problem is how to reconstruct their grammatical and lexical consistency. In other cases, linguists must previously ascertain whether the dialects indirectly evoked by grammarians, travelers, and other coeval observers had a real diffusion, or were just the products of ideological constructions, whose social causes are now mostly irretrievable. An interesting case-study is represented by Alexandrine Greek, i.e. Greek as was spoken in Hellenistic times in the city of Alexandria, an elusive variety often mentioned by lexicographers (generally advising readers not to imitate it) whose real existence, at least in the form of a well-defined dialect perceived as such by its speakers, is highly doubtful (see Favi & Tribulato in this volume).

As for contemporary minority languages, what is usually assessed is the degree of endangerment, that is of limited diffusion, functional retreat, and disruption of cross-generational transmission. The reference scale is the one provided by the UNESCO's Language Vitality and Endangerment Framework, going from 'safe' to 'extinct'. In between, the values 'unsafe', 'definitely endangered', 'severely endangered', and 'critically endangered' are measured according to a series of external (sociolinguistic) parameters, such as the absolute number of speakers, the proportion of speakers within the total population, the trends in existing language domains, the response to new domains and media, the materials for language education and literacy, and the language attitudes and policies.<sup>14</sup> Curiously enough, internal criteria, i.e. the level of attrition affecting the grammar and the vocabulary, are not taken into account, probably because they cannot be quantified and thus set on a scale with all other parameters. Nevertheless, the loss of words and structural features, along with their possible replacement with words and structures borrowed from one or more dominant languages, is often as eloquent as the external criteria, especially for contexts of the recent past for which such criteria cannot be quantified (see, in this volume, Filipponio's and Zuin's critical analysis of the data elicited from the last speakers of, respectively, Vegliote, Capraino, and the Cimbrian dialect of Foza). Such a fragmentariness, despite being of a different nature from that of ancient 'Restsprachen' as seen above, likewise requires the linguists to operate a reconstruction, whose methods will be analyzed in detail in the following paragraph.

14 <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/00120-EN.pdf> (last accessed on 20 March 2023). The EDGIS (see above) is a finer scale over ten levels ranging from international to extinct.

## 2 Reconstructing Fragmentary Languages

### 2.1 *Which Kind of Reconstruction?*

In linguistics, the term reconstruction is generally applied to the operation which leads to the recovery of earlier linguistic systems.<sup>15</sup> Specifically, such a term usually refers to the use of the comparative method as well as of the internal reconstruction for recovering parts or elements of a linguistic system on the basis of, respectively, later extant or documented linguistic systems proved to be genetically related or a subsequent phase of the same linguistic system (see below). Nevertheless, as noted for example by Joseph & Janda (2003: 94), the term reconstruction is also applied to the recovery of a linguistic system on the basis of direct and/or indirect sources:<sup>16</sup>

while many linguists limit their use of the term “reconstruction” to the positing of forms and constructions for linguistic stages from which no records survive, it is actually the case that even attested stages of languages require considerable interpretation and filling-in of details—as well as more substantial aspects. Hence virtually all historical linguistic research merits the descriptor “reconstruction”.

The use of the same label for both operations makes one wonder whether it is actually the very same operation or two different operations labelled in the same way. In both cases, the aim is to recover a linguistic system and therefore the label ‘(linguistic) reconstruction’ seems to be entirely appropriate.<sup>17</sup> However, despite some further similarities, the initial evidence, the methods applied, and the outcomes of the two operations do not coincide, thus suggesting the need to distinguish two different types of linguistic reconstruction.

Linguistic reconstruction in the traditional sense (LR<sub>1</sub>) starts from (parts or elements of) already known living and/or dead linguistic systems and aims at inferring (parts or elements of) an earlier genetically related linguistic system, with particular regard to phonological, morphological, and lexical aspects.<sup>18</sup> Such an inference is essentially based on comparison, which may be either intra- or cross-linguistic. Specifically, the comparative method relies on the

15 For an explicit definition see, for example, Birnbaum (1978: 6), Fox (1995: 3), and Campbell (2013: 107).

16 See also Prosdocimi (2004: 673).

17 For the sense of ‘reconstruction’ in other scientific domains, see below.

18 The issue of reconstruction in syntax has recently been dealt with by Barðdal, Gildea & Luján (2020).

comparison of two or more genetically related languages in order to reconstruct their common ancestor,<sup>19</sup> whereas the internal reconstruction compares alternations within a single language, such as morphophonemic alternations, in order to reconstruct an earlier phase of that language.<sup>20</sup> The application of such methods is theoretically independent of the possible documentation of the linguistic system to be reconstructed, whether it is a common ancestor or an earlier phase of the same language. Thus, for example, the reconstruction of the Latin ancestor of a set of Romance cognates may, in principle, disregard the actual Latin documentation.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the status of what is reconstructed through  $LR_1$  is a matter of debate. In particular, according to a so-called idealist position, “ce qui fournit la méthode de la grammaire comparée [...] n’est rien autre chose qu’un système défini de correspondances entre les langues historiquement attestées”.<sup>22</sup> Otherwise said, the outcome of such an operation would not be a part or element actually existed of a linguistic system, but an abstract object which stands for the set of correspondences between genetically related languages which implies a common ancestor.<sup>23</sup> Conversely, according to a realistic position,  $LR_1$  would allow to actually recover parts or elements of an earlier linguistic system, although more or less approximately.<sup>24</sup>

As already noted, linguistic reconstruction may also refer to the operation of interpretation and filling-in the gaps of attested linguistic systems ( $LR_2$ ). In such a case, the initial evidence is the corpus of texts (usually in written form, but in modern times possibly also recorded) which attest a linguistic system as well as indirect sources such as glosses and linguistic commentaries. Hence  $LR_2$  aims at inferring the functioning and possibly the development of the linguistic system which underlies the texts taken into consideration. Such a reconstruction may be achieved through a complex methodology which combines philology, hermeneutics, and linguistic analysis (see § 2.2 below). With regard

19 The applicability of the comparative method, founded and developed within Indo-European studies, to other linguistic families may be considered ascertained, although it has been questioned several times (see, for example, Baldi 1991).

20 On the theoretical similarity between the comparative method and the internal reconstruction see Fox (1995: 210–214), Kristó (2004: 118–120), and Prosdociami (2004: *passim*).

21 The role of Latin forms in the reconstruction of Romance etymologies is a matter of debate: see Buchi & Schweickard (2010) and Varvaro (2011).

22 Meillet (1903: 28).

23 Arguments against such a position are collected by Lass (1993: 164–170). It should be noted that the debate has not concerned the status of what is reconstructed through internal reconstruction.

24 See Kristó (2004) and Lass (2017).

to linguistic analysis, intra- and cross-linguistic comparison plays a central role, although in a different way from what has been seen for  $LR_1$ . In particular, in the case of  $LR_1$  the comparison aims at identifying the intralinguistic alternations and the cross-linguistic correspondences which have a historic implication. In the case of  $LR_2$ , the intralinguistic comparison is functional to the linguistic analysis, for example in identifying morphemes and their possible allomorphs, whereas the cross-linguistic comparison may be used for deriving grammatical and semantic information from genetically related languages as well as languages in contact or for assessing the typological plausibility of what has been reconstructed (see § 2.2 below). Usually, the outcomes of  $LR_2$ , unlike what has been seen above for  $LR_1$ , are not questioned from the point of view of their theoretical status, probably because they are related to historically attested languages. However, these outcomes depend essentially on inferences, which as such may be more or less provable and probable (see § 2.2 below). As already mentioned,  $LR_2$  operation usually applies to languages attested by various sized corpora of texts (from 'Restsprachen' to large-corpus languages; see § 1.3 above). Nevertheless, although it may seem odd at first glance, such an operation seems to be also suitable for minority endangered languages. In this case, what may be fragmentary—and, therefore, to be reconstructed—is not so much the documentation, but the very speakers' competence, due to the reduction of the ranges of use, considerable interference phenomena with the majority languages, and the possibly exclusive presence of semi-speakers (see § 1.2 above). Therefore, the nature, amount, and cause of the missing parts in 'Restsprachen' and endangered languages are radically different but both cases require a similar methodology for recovering such parts.

As an aside, it may be noticed that the sense of 'reconstruction' as used in  $LR_2$  seems closer to that of other scientific domains than as used in  $LR_1$ , at least at first glance. In general, Klein, Joseph & Fritz (2017: 15) note that:

[t]he problem of reconstruction occurs in all sciences dealing with unobservable phenomena: history (reconstructing past situations and their processes of change), archaeology (reconstructing material and non-material culture of lost peoples), and justice (reconstructing incidents and offending events).

However, in these and other domains (such as palaeontology), the main purpose is to reconstruct past objects and events, whatever their nature, primarily on the basis of their remains and not to reconstruct past objects and events on the basis of a particular configuration observed in later objects and events. Correspondingly, the purpose of  $LR_2$  is to reconstruct past languages from their

documentation, whereas  $LR_1$  aims at reconstructing past languages from correspondences between later languages or alternations within a single later phase of a language (see above).

## 2.2 *Methods for Reconstructing Fragmentary Languages ( $LR_2$ )*

Explicit theoretical and methodological reflections on  $LR_2$  are rather sporadic,<sup>25</sup> despite numerous works devoted to reconstructing (elements or parts of) languages. Furthermore, such reflections focus almost exclusively on fragmentary languages in the strict sense ('Restsprachen' in current terminology), due to the particular difficulty of their  $LR_2$ . However, as seen above (§ 1.1), the notion of 'fragmentary language' may be extended to include any language whose knowledge is based on a text corpus—whatever its size—and/or indirect sources as well as any minority endangered language of which speakers have a fragmentary competence. Likewise, the following methodological considerations should be deemed suitable to the  $LR_2$  of any language of which there is only partial evidence.

In general,  $LR_2$  may only proceed from the known to the unknown, as any other form of knowledge.<sup>26</sup> Since we usually deal with corpora of written texts, the investigation into the writing systems used for rendering the language as well as the philological study of the texts are essential prerequisites. The knowledge of the writing systems includes the identification of the phonetic and/or logographic values of the signs which compose such systems, their usage rules, and their possible variations.<sup>27</sup> Obviously, such a knowledge may be extensive and accurate to varying degrees. Anyway, in the case of partially or totally phonetic writing systems, the writing system itself is the main gateway to the phonetic system of the language to be reconstructed. Specifically, clues to the underlying phonetic reality may come from internal evidence, such as the identification of phonetic changes assumed a priori to be regular, different spellings for the same forms, stylistic choices due to the poetic nature of the texts, and spelling of loanwords (see Corò in this volume).<sup>28</sup> With regard to the borrowing

25 In this regard, Campanile (1983), Untermann (1983; 1989), Prosdocimi (1989), Meid (1997), Poccetti (1997), Agostiniani (2003), Miller (2004), Waldenberg (2016), and Rigobianco (2022) may be mentioned.

26 See, for example, Hegel (1816: 316; "Man muß insofern sagen, daß das Erkennen, wenn es einmal angefangen hat, immer vom Bekannten zum Unbekannten fortgehe").

27 For an introduction to the world's writing systems see Daniels & Bright (1996) and Coulmas (2002). On the decipherment of ancient scripts and languages, the reference work remains Friedrich (1954).

28 Saussure (1916: 58–61); Bloomfield (1933: 293–296). For a broad overview on such evidences, see Hodge (1972).

phenomena, the transmission of a whole writing system from one language to another<sup>29</sup> deserves special mention for its potential usefulness in reconstructing the phonetic system of a fragmentary language.

The philological study is made necessary by the very nature of written texts, which are the product of a possibly complex process, going from the planning to the realisation by one or more writers—not necessarily coinciding with whoever designed the text—with diversified tools and techniques on various supports having different degrees of perishability. Thus, it may follow that the actually realised text does not fully correspond to the planned text due to errors and/or subsequent interventions by the writer(s), the execution makes it difficult to recognise some letters, the text is not entirely legible due to damage to the support, and so forth. This does not only apply to texts in ancient ‘Restsprachen’ but also to transcriptions of oral texts pertaining to contemporary endangered languages, in particular with reference to the accuracy of the transcription itself, which is a fundamental prerequisite for the reconstruction but may be affected by misunderstandings, over-interpretations, inconsistencies and so forth. *Mutatis mutandis*, similar considerations also hold for recorded oral texts, regarding which, for example, it might be difficult to recognise part of the speech chain. Therefore, philology is needed to provide LR<sub>2</sub> with well-grounded textual data.<sup>30</sup>

Once the texts have been philologically established, it is possible to proceed to linguistic analysis and interpretation, which usually pose no major problems with contemporary endangered languages. In general terms, such operations are closely interrelated, thus constituting a sort of hermeneutic circle within which advances in the interpretation of texts may lead to advances in the grammar knowledge and vice versa.<sup>31</sup> More generally, the investigation into the writing systems and the philological study of the texts (see above) also fall within such a circle, since they necessarily require some prior linguistic knowledge. Hence, all such procedures, although described as distinct and consequential for the sake of clarity, intrinsically rely on each other.<sup>32</sup>

Interpretation, for its part, may benefit from the methodologies developed within the long tradition of theoretical reflections in the fields of hermeneut-

29 See, for example, Baglioni & Tribulato (2015: 19–22), who have introduced the label ‘transcription’ for such a phenomenon.

30 On the relationship between philology and historical linguistics see Hale (2007: 19–26).

31 See Meid (1997: 597, 599). On the hermeneutic circle in relation to LR<sub>2</sub> see also Waldenberger (2016: 131).

32 See Agostiniani (2003: 117 n. 21).

ics<sup>33</sup> as well as text linguistics.<sup>34</sup> As for the linguistic analysis, since, as mentioned, the reflections on LR<sub>2</sub> have mostly focused on ‘Restsprachen’, it is usually understood as the mere identification of linguistic units on the basis of a syntagmatic and paradigmatic analysis of texts.<sup>35</sup> However, linguistic analysis may be more appropriately defined as the whole methodology through which it is possible to infer the linguistic system which underlies the texts under consideration with reference to all linguistic levels. In light of this, it is evident that the linguistic analysis and the consequent LR<sub>2</sub> are shaped by explicit or implicit assumptions about how language and languages work.<sup>36</sup> In this regard, the uniformitarian principle takes on a crucial importance.<sup>37</sup> In particular, such a principle has both a heuristic and confirmatory function for LR<sub>2</sub>—as well as for LR<sub>1</sub>—, as, on the one hand, it sets expectations about the linguistic systems to be reconstructed and, on the other hand, it may confirm or deny what has been reconstructed—or, at least, it may assess its degree of probability.

Furthermore, linguistic analysis and interpretation may take advantage of the possible genetic relationship between the fragmentary language to be reconstructed and other known languages.<sup>38</sup> However, such an operation presents difficulties at both a formal and a semantic level. At a formal level, the etymological link between a form pertaining to a fragmentary language and one or more forms pertaining to genetically related languages cannot always be determined with certainty. In particular, this may depend on various reasons, such as the only partial knowledge of the phonetic changes which have affected the fragmentary language or the possible homophony between the outcomes of originally distinct forms. At a semantic level, the sharing of a common etymology between two forms, one pertaining to the fragmentary language to be reconstructed and the other to a genetically related language, does not entail that the meaning of the latter may be automatically applied to the former, due

33 For an introduction to hermeneutics, see Keane & Lawn (2015).

34 For the text linguistics as a hermeneutics of sense, see Coseriu (1994).

35 See Schmidt (1983: 83–84) and Agostiniani (2003: 115–117).

36 See Waldenberger (2016: 117–119).

37 Such a principle, already applied by Jakobson (1958) in relation to the reconstruction of Proto-Indo-European consonantism, was made explicit by Labov (1974). On the relationship between linguistic typology and LR<sub>1</sub>, see also Comrie 1993.

38 On such an operation, often referred to as ‘etymological method’, and its limits see Untermann (1983: 25–28), Schmidt (1983: 84), Meid (1997: 595–597), and Agostiniani (2003: 118–119). On the converse operation of using fragmentary languages for LR<sub>1</sub> see most recently Di Giovine (2023).

to the possibility of different semantic changes from a common original meaning as well as to the intrinsic historical dimension of meaning.

Advances in the linguistic analysis and interpretation of a fragmentary language may also be achieved through the identification of interference phenomena.<sup>39</sup> Thus, by way of example, the identification of a lexical borrowing in a certain language may lead to the reconstruction of an otherwise unattested lexical form of a fragmentary source language. In general terms, it is evident that such an identification depends on the knowledge of the concerned linguistic systems as well as their internal and external history. Therefore, it is severely compromised when the source language or the target language—or even both—are fragmentary. Furthermore, different interference phenomena have varying degrees of recognisability and their identification is complicated by the lack of systematicity which instead characterizes the correspondences between genetically related languages (see Rigobianco in this volume). In any case, as seen above with regard to the use of genetic relationship for linguistic analysis and interpretation purposes, such an operation presents difficulties at both a formal and a semantic level. In particular, borrowed material cannot be assumed to reconstruct automatically the source counterpart for reasons intrinsic to the dynamics of linguistic interference (such as semantic restriction and morphophonological integration in the case of loanwords) and, more generally, linguistic change. With regard to contemporary endangered languages, the identification of interference phenomena due to the attrition process is particularly relevant for reconstructing the linguistic system as it was prior to the process itself.

As mentioned above, indirect sources may also contribute to LR<sub>2</sub>. Such sources, which are fundamentally metalinguistic in nature, may either have a systematic or episodic character and be of various types, such as grammars, dictionaries, glosses, and linguistic remarks.<sup>40</sup> The main problem with using such sources concerns their reliability (see Baglioni in this volume). Specifically, the accuracy of the linguistic information depends on various factors, such as whether it is first- or second-hand information as well as the aims and linguistic ideology of whoever supplies it. Anyway, the problem of reliability has a much wider scope. In particular, in the light of the configuration of LR<sub>2</sub> operation as a sort of circle going from the known to the unknown through a series of inferences based on the methods illustrated above, the issue of data robust-

39 The reference work on linguistic interference remains Thomason & Kaufmann (1988).

40 Translations into better-known languages occurring in multilingual texts may be considered as a particular type of indirect source, which may be very helpful in the linguistic analysis and interpretation of 'Restsprachen'.



ness is of paramount importance (see Marinetti & Solinas in this volume). In this regard, we can refer to the so-called joint probability rule, according to which—in approximate terms—probabilities do not add up but multiply.<sup>41</sup> Otherwise said, the hypothesis which follows from two hypotheses ('if ..., if ..., then ...') is less probable than the two. For this reason, it is necessary to take constantly into account the inferential chain on which interpretation and linguistic analysis are based as well as the provability and probability of each hypothesis considered within the chain itself. More generally, this makes it clear that extreme caution is needed in the reconstruction of a fragmentary language.

### 3 Scope and Organisation of the Book

In light of the above, the book aims to verify the application of the notion of fragmentation, commonly used with reference to ancient dead languages attested only through a quantitatively and qualitatively limited corpus of texts, to diachronic or diatopic varieties of even well-known extinct or alive languages as well as contemporary endangered languages. In particular, the following thirteen chapters are devoted to examining general or specific issues relating to fragmentary—in the broad sense just stated—languages extremely diversified in chronology, location, and quantity and type of documentation, varying from ancient Babylonian to contemporary Istro-Romanian. The resulting overview allows to focus on several theoretical and methodological questions concerning, on the one hand, the very notion of fragmentary language and documentation and, on the other, the strategies for reconstructing the respective linguistic systems and their history. Specifically, among the topics discussed are the traditional notions of 'Restsprache' and 'Trümmersprache' (Merlin, Pisaniello & Rizza; Loporcaro), the way of dealing with newly acquired data in LR<sub>2</sub> (Marinetti & Solinas), the reliability and exploitation of indirect sources for reconstructing otherwise unattested or poorly attested linguistic systems (Favi & Tribulato; Barbato & Minervini; Baglioni) and in particular the use of loanwords for reconstructing features of the source linguistic system (Corò; Merlin, Pisaniello & Rizza; Vuletić), the reconstruction of fragmentarily attested varieties of well-known languages (Cognola), the re-analysis of texts written in an archaic, no longer spoken variety by speakers of a more recent variety of the same language (Ciampini), the identification of the inherited

41 On such a rule with regard to LR<sub>2</sub> see Prosdocimi (1989: 134–136). See also Meid (1997: 593).

portion of grammar net of attrition phenomena as well as of hypercharacterization by semi-speakers in the case of endangered languages (Filipponio; Zuin; Loporcaro), and the detection of contact-induced changes involving fragmentary languages (Rigobianco).

Paola Corò, *Fragments of Greek in Babylonian*

This chapter deals with Greek forms in Babylonian texts of the Hellenistic and Parthian periods and Babylonian forms in texts written using Greek script of the same periods. Specifically, through a series of examples, it aims to assess whether and how such forms can be used to reconstruct features of the specific linguistic varieties to whom they pertain.

Emanuele M. Ciampini, *Fragments of 'Solar Royal Compositions' in the Pharaonic Tradition: 'Unterweltbücher' and Other Related Texts in the Late Egyptian Tradition*

This chapter addresses the reception and reuse in Late Egypt of a corpus of written liturgical and funerary texts attested from the New Kingdom onwards. In particular, it focuses on the textual and linguistic strategies adopted when reusing 'Solar Royal Compositions' such as the 'Unterweltbücher', when the variety in which such texts were written had not been used for centuries.

Stella Merlin, Valerio Pisaniello & Alfredo Rizza, *'Restsprachen' in Ancient Anatolia: Direct and Indirect Sources, Transmission, and Reconstruction*

This chapter discusses the adequacy of traditional labels such as 'Restsprachen', 'Corpussprachen', and 'Trümmersprachen' with reference to different languages of Ancient Anatolia (11–1 millennium BCE) as well as the relevance of the indirect sources (names, glosses, etc.) for their knowledge. In this regard, it discusses the reliability of Hesychius' Lydian glosses βᾶσκε πικρολέα, κοαλδδῆιν, and μυτταλυτα.

F. Favi, O. Tribulato, *Ancient Greek as a Fragmentary Language: What Is 'Alexandrian Greek'?*

This chapter takes into consideration the possible distinctive features of the Greek attested in the epigraphic evidence from Alexandria as well as the ancient metalinguistic reflections on the variety of Greek attributed to its inhabitants. In particular, it shows that the label 'Alexandrian' is commonly used in ancient sources to stigmatise some forms as characteristic of a low variety of koine Greek.

A. Marinetti, P. Solinas, *The Fragmentarily Attested Languages of Pre-Roman Italy: Interpreting, Reconstructing, Classifying*

This chapter offers some theoretical and methodological considerations on the fragmentary languages, with particular attention to the way of dealing with newly acquired data. The chapter then considers some examples from Venetic and Cisalpine Celtic and shows how, despite the fragmentary nature of their documentation, some newly acquired data has contributed respectively to the identification of well-grounded etymologies and to a better reconstruction of Proto-Celtic.

L. Rigobianco, *'Restsprachen' and Language Contact: Latin, Etruscan, and the Sabellic Languages*

This chapter seeks to shed light on the possibilities of reconstruction of contact-induced changes involving fragmentary languages. Specifically, such a question is addressed examining the well-known hypothesis according to which the vowel reduction and deletion which occurred in Etruscan, Latin, and the Sabellic languages would be contact-induced.

M. Barbato, L. Minervini, *Reconstructing a Language from Fragmentary and Discontinuous Records: Andalusian Romance (So-Called 'Mozarabic')*

This chapter aims at reconstructing the main features of the phonological system of Andalusian Romance (so-called Mozarabic), by using two different typologies of sources: the lexemes attested in Medieval texts (glossaries, *har-ġāt*, etc.) and the lexical relics in Modern Spanish contained in Corominas' and Pascual's *Diccionario crítico-etimológico castellano e hispánico*. It will be shown that, despite their heterogeneity and problematicity, these sources can give a relevant contribution to our knowledge of a complex and evasive linguistic variety, whose historical importance cannot be overestimated.

N. Vuletić, *Indirectly Attested Dalmatian Romance Varieties: Survey and Perspectives*

This chapter discusses the status of the extinct autochthonous Romance varieties of Dalmatia in historical linguistics. The author argues that the traditional 'Dalmatian' or 'Dalmatian Romance' subgrouping should be reconsidered taking full advantage of indirect sources. These sources permit us to identify a primitive linguistic unity, involving a particular set of innovations and conservations, in the northern part of the region.

D. Baglioni, *What Remains of an Atypical 'Restsprache': The Mediterranean Lingua Franca*

This chapter is devoted to the so-called Lingua Franca, an indirectly attested Romance-based variety circulating in the Early Modern Mediterranean, characterized by a very simple, pidgin-like grammar. Although most information on this linguistic variety is provided by a dictionary published in 1830, considered by scholars as its main (and almost unique) source, the data supplied in this text is inconsistent with what can be expected from an only spoken, non-native linguistic variety, with limited functions and domains. As a result, by a thorough analysis of all available sources and their comparison with typologically similar dialects, the fragmentary nature not only of the documentation, but of Lingua Franca itself will be underlined.

L. Filipponio, *'Restsprecher' and Hypercharacterizing Informants between Veglia and Capraia*

In case of language shift or language loss (or both together), speakers are no longer able to control grammatical features of the obsolescent language. The typical symptoms of attrition are reduction of paradigms, simplifications, analogies, analytic structures. Combining this with the collateral effects of elicitation, i.e. a metalinguistic act which may lead speakers to purposely over-report shibboleth-like features and patterns, often results in over-characterizations which linguists have to be aware of. This chapter deals with two famous witnesses of the very last stages of Romance varieties both spoken in islands, Capraia (Capraïno, a North Corsican variety disappeared in the 1980s) and Veglia (Vegliote, the last Dalmatian dialect, disappeared in 1898) respectively, and tries to show how to cope with these 'dangerous' data.

F. Cognola, *On the Translation of the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Mòcheno: Linguistic Analysis and Connection to the Extinct Variety of Vignola*

This chapter is devoted to Mòcheno, a German language spoken since the Middle Ages in the Fersina valley (Trentino, Northern Italy). Specifically, the chapter focuses on the oldest text written in Mòcheno, a translation of the Parable of the Prodigal Son collected at the beginning of the 19th century, which has been long considered, due to the strong presence of Romance elements, an example for the 'corrupted' character of this language already in its earliest attestations. Nevertheless, a fine-grained comparison between the generally known version of this Parable and a second version recently discovered in Rouen shows that the language of the manuscript is to be considered a conservative dialect, possibly corresponding to the extinct Mòcheno variety spoken in the village of Vignola.

F. Zuin, *Semi-Speakers and Data Reliability: The Case of the Cimbrian Variety of Foza*

This chapter focuses on the linguistic analysis of the Cimbrian variety of Foza, a German dialect attested only by an unpublished list of words collected by Bruno Schweizer, who interviewed in 1941 the last speaker. Firstly, some problems related to the reliability of data furnished by a semi-speaker, whose Cimbrian idiolect has suffered a deep attrition from the Venetan variety, will be discussed. Secondly, basing on genuine linguistic data, some peculiarities of this scantily attested variety will be underlined, by comparing it to other Cimbrian dialects on the one hand, and to Old High German on the other.

M. Loporcaro, *Notes on the Morphology and Syntax of a 'Restsprache in Re': Istro-Romanian*

This chapter deals with Istro-Romanian, an endangered dialect of Romanian spoken in a handful of villages in the peninsula of Istria, Croatia. On the basis of field data gathered in the framework of the SNF project "Linguistic morphology in time and space" (LiMiTS), the chapter shows how the original Romance variety has been strongly affected by the prevailing Croatian dialects, by focusing on clitics (and clitics position), conjunctions, comparatives and superlatives, and the verbal system (as far as both aspect/*Aktionsart* and agreement are concerned). In conclusion, the importance of the change in grammatical features of this heavily threatened language for both theoretical morphology and contact linguistics is underlined.

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